

2/18/2023

Dear Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Molly Harris. I am a resident of New Haven and a member of UNITE-HERE Local 33. I am testifying in support of a rent cap and in support of SB 4, with changes to better protect tenants.

I am an international graduate worker at Yale. The university pays me \$38,300 per year before tax. Because of my immigration status, I cannot do any work beyond the teaching required by my program. My monthly rent in New Haven is \$1,725. This does not include the high cost of utilities. My rent came up to this amount in August of 2022. The year prior, I paid \$1,500 monthly for the same apartment. Farnam, the company that manages my building, initially proposed an increase to \$1,795. When I looked into alternative rental housing at that time, I learned that Farnam had taken over the management of numerous buildings in my neighborhood. Almost every apartment that was available for rent was managed by Farnam and was the same price as my current apartment – if not higher.

During the process of negotiating this increase last spring, the building management neglected to fix the leaking, moldy ceiling in my apartment. I had first made management aware of the leak on December 25, 2021. It was not fixed until the end of this January – **2023**. The building management only began to treat the leak as a serious issue after I filed a complaint with the city. Over the course of these 13 months, I developed a number of mold exposure symptoms: headaches, fatigue, rashes, brain fog, and new food sensitivities. This was the second major leak I experienced since moving to this apartment, the first of which took over three months to resolve.

The cost of rental housing in New Haven has skyrocketed since I moved here in August of 2020. The reverberations of these increases have been felt throughout my community in New Haven and at Yale. Particularly because of the near-monopoly that just a few corporate landlords hold in New Haven, it is nearly impossible to find alternatives. It has also made me hesitant to escalate my concerns about unsafe housing conditions to the city. I spent several months calculating the cost and benefit of requesting assistance from the city – and potentially being forced to move – or continuing to deal solely with the property management to avoid the high cost of moving and the likelihood of an even more expensive apartment.

My doctoral research is on public health and American welfare in the 20th century. The history I learn and teach contains a straightforward lesson: Keeping housing safe and affordable is not only one of the clearest ways to protect individual and public health. It is also a crucial means of

ensuring economic vitality in our communities. Rent stabilization initiatives do not – and historically have never – blocked economic development.

I strongly support a rent cap in Connecticut, but SB 4 would be stronger with the following changes:

- **The cap should be lower – I suggest 2.5%.** This tracks pre-pandemic average rent increases and would be affordable and predictable to tenants.
- **It should cover apartments in between tenants** so landlords can't push out tenants to increase the rent.
- **It should expand good cause eviction protections** to cover all tenants so they have greater stability in their homes.

Sincerely,

Molly Harris

PhD Student and Teaching Fellow, Department of History, Yale University

New Haven